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ABSTRACT

Counselor educators and practitioners have debated the necessity of classroom teaching prior to becoming a school counselor. This research seeks to add to the discussion by presenting the perspective of practicing school counselors and administrators in Montana. Additionally, the study was conducted following a Montana Office of Public Instruction decision not to require classroom experience for purposes of school counselor certification. Administrators and counselors were asked to rank their opinions as to whether or not classroom teaching was necessary, and, if so, how many years of teaching would be optimum. Results indicate that practicing school counselors are equally divided on the optimum teaching background required to become a school counselor: either 1-3 years or 4-7 years. School administrators reported that the ideal teaching background would be 4-7 years. The that the ideal teaching background would be four to seven years. The research suggests that longitudinal information is needed, thus necessitating additional information for documenting trends. Two tables present data. Contains 34 references. (Author/TS)

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Differences in Perception of Classroom Teaching Experience for School Counselor Certification Requirements in Montana

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Abstract

Counselor educators and practitioners have debated the necessity of classroom teaching prior to becoming a school counselor. This research seeks to add to the discussion by presenting the perspective of practicing school counselors and administrators in Montana. Additionally the study was conducted following a Montana Office of Public Instruction decision not to require classroom experience for purposes of school counselor certification. Administrators and counselors were asked to rank their opinions as to whether or not classroom teaching experience was necessary, and, if so, how many years of teaching would be optimum. Results indicate that practicing school counselors are equally divided on the optimum teaching background required to become a school counselor: either 1 to 3 year or 4 to 7 years. School administrators reported that the ideal teaching background would be 4 to 7 years. Implications of these findings are presented in the following document.

Differences in Perception of Classroom Teaching Experience for School Counselor Certification Requirements in Montana

Introduction

The certification branch of the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) recently changed teacher experience requirements for school counselor certification that may have widespread implications for counseling and consequently counselor education at Montana State University-Billings. In 1969 Lister outlined the arguments put forth by proponents and opponents of teaching experience before becoming a school counselor. A review of the literature indicates these traditional notions haven't changed. Almost twenty years later Barret and Schmidt (1986) indicated that little difference existed in the consensus information about the type of qualifications necessary for school counselor certification standards. Most recently, Olson and Allen (1993) indicated that significant differences exist in some aspects of middle school counselor duties when performed by individuals with and without classroom teaching experience. That same study noted no differences existed when elementary and secondary counselors were studied.

The question for the proposed research was: Are these long held beliefs consistent with current research? This proposal attempts to provide an empirical base to measure the perception of classroom teaching requirements in counselor training in Montana. Prior to 1994, verification of three years of successful teaching experience was regarded as an essential background component for school counselors. This requirement was designed to give the school counselor experience in school systems and to help the counselor develop skills for working with

students, teacher, and administrators and an empathy for the teaching experience.

As part of recent thesis research, conducted at Eastern Montana College (now Montana State University-Billings) in 1993, a questionnaire which was distributed to a five state area. The thesis revealed that there was little consensus as to the necessity for having school counselors experience successful classroom teaching. Following a presentation of the thesis results to OPI, a decision to change the teaching requirement was made. Areas of statistical significance presented in the thesis were a) attitudes toward relationships with teachers, administrators, and duties; and b) general satisfaction with the field of school counseling. That is to say, these two areas were correlated with successful school counseling. These areas of reported significance are consistent with portions of the literature. No significance was noted in the area of successful teaching experience. In summary, there is a body of literature that suggests school counselors need not have a successful teaching experience prior to consoling in a school setting.

A successful teaching experience is not needed

According to a recent unpublished thesis (Bush, 1993) at Eastern Montana College (now Montana State University-Billings) a three year successful teaching experience is not needed. This conclusion supports what Barret and Schmidt (1986) report as teaching may be perceived as a barrier to quality individuals who may wish to enter the school counseling profession and end up having their interests chilled as a result of a prior experience requirement.

During an earlier review of the profession, Cohen (1961) suggests that an inherent barrier exits between counselors and teachers that is so impenetrable the two fields are mutually exclusive; teaching experience is not needed. Joining Cohen, Stewart (1961) noted that the barrier is not just abstract but concrete as some discouraged counselors-to-be note that an eight year period is really required (this includes the undergraduate requirement for teacher education). Even when counselors' background of teacher education and classroom experience is part of background, Wittmer and Webster (1969) indicate that the practice experience required is actually a detriment to effective counseling. This notion of an addition inherent barrier is also previously noted by Peterson and Brown (1968).

Kehas and Morse (1970) expand the notion of an inherent barrier by emphasizing the perspectives that former teachers hold. Their research note that counselors with teaching experience noted difficulty in making a shift to see students' needs from a counseling perspective. This concept of teacher/counselor friction is highlighted by Friedland (1969) who indicate that counselors without teaching experience perceive counselors with teaching experience in pejorative ways. In fact, knowing about school policies and being familiar with procedures may be detrimental to counselors and not related to counselor effectiveness at all (Havens, 1972). In fact, Dilley, Foster, and Bowers (1973) found that a small percentage (17%) of the counselors without teaching experience were rated as less effective than counselors with teaching experience. Finally, Baker and Herr (1976) noted no significance difference among principals' rating of counselor effectiveness for counselors with or without

teaching experience and Hoffman, Gerstein, and Lichtman (1992) note no difference while examining six variables of counselor effectiveness.

A successful teaching experience is needed.

A review of the literature also indicates that there is evidence for the need of a successful teaching experience. Knowledge of the classroom is often utilized by clinicians in determining plans of action and interventions when developing student specific plans for education and behavior management (Martin, 1993). Actual experience in terms of years teaching is not as important as a background for teachers and counselors (Moon, Willis, Bailey, & Kwasny, 1993). Collaboration and consultation with peers is related to experience (VandeCreek & Sexton, 1994). Evidence exists that matching teacher interest and practice type is beneficial (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). Classroom experience enhances effectiveness when providing services to self-help groups (Gold, Hughes, & Hohnecker, 1994). Experience with performance assessment in the classroom enhances the ability of counselors to participate in counseling program effectiveness (Baker, O'Neil, & Linn, 1993). The practice of developing appropriate empathy is increased by previous experience in the classroom (Bellak, 1994). Direct classroom experience increases the participation in potentially relevant reports (e.g., IEPs). ("Guidelines for Child Custody," 1994). Classroom experience provides an opportunity to examine a problem carefully, taking note of ethical, legal, and policy dimensions, and, where necessary attempting to reconcile any competing personal value preferences, while providing a place to develop skills that are useful to both teachers and counselors (Hoyt, 1961; McCarthey & Sorenson, 1993). Classroom teaching experiences provide a

forum for initiating and utilizing a self-help approach when appropriate (Kivligham, Johnston, Hogan, & Mauer, 1994). At-risk-kids particularly benefit from working with teachers and counselors when violence intervention strategies are needed (DeAngelis, 1994). Generally speaking, since teaching experience makes someone a better teacher, that experience should also make that person a better counselor (Hudson, 1961). Administrators view several years of classroom teaching experience as important and carry over those view to the hiring process (Baker, 1994; Hopper, Brown, & Pfister, 1970).

Hypothesis

Counselor education programs present an opportunity to examine what, if any, foundational aspects prepare an individual to best utilize a counseling curriculum (Smith, 1994). To describe the extent of the foundational nature, a research question was investigated which provides the basis for a longitudinal (5 year) series of self-report questionnaires. The basis for the instrument is a Likert scale instrument designed to elicit self-report rankings from the participants.

An initial draft of the questionnaire was administered to 22 students who had completed a plan of study and were members of a Psychological Testing class at Montana State University-Billings in the Fall semester, 1995. The instrument was modified according to the concerns and ideas of the students.

Method

Participants

Individuals who were identified by OPI as school counselors were sampled. Counselors were grouped into zip code order and sampled from

ten zip codes areas in Montana. The ten areas selected were comprised of the first three digits of the five digit zip codes. Fifty percent of the counselors were randomly selected in each of the ten areas. This type of stratified sampling was used so that biases of larger zip codes areas (more urban) would be mitigated (Ostle, 1963; Witte 1993).

Once individual counselors were selected, administrators were identified by using the most recent school directory for the state of Montana. A total of 211 counselors and 133 administrators were included in the study. Age and gender comprised the two demographic characteristics used by the instrument.

Variables and Procedure

The questionnaire packet began with a cover letter from the authors indicating the nature of the information contained in the questions that followed, promise of confidentiality, and suggestion of approximate time necessary to complete the instrument. There were no differences between the instruments used for counselors and administrators except for a wording change in the cover letter that allowed separation between the two groups for coding purposes.

Demographic characteristics were presented for the respondents to choose categories that were most applicable. Age ranges were 23-30, 31-37, 38-45, 46-55, and over 55. Gender choices were female and male. Respondents were asked to circle the category that best described them.

Individuals were then asked to categorize themselves as either counselors or administrators and to indicate the number of years they held been in that position. Respondents were asked to choose a category that described the number of years of classroom teacher experience

before that individual became an administrator or counselor, whichever was appropriate. The categories of choice were none, 1-3, 4-7, 8-11, and 12 or more years. Finally, respondents were asked, in an ideal situation, how long should an individual teach in the classroom before becoming a school counselor. Choices within the categories included teaching experience is not necessary, 1-3, 4-7, 8-11, and 12 or more years. Two weeks after the initial mailing, a post card reminder was sent to all participants.

Data Analysis

As this research is suggested to be a beginning for longitudinal study, quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. Quantitative analysis used was a test for identical populations (Hays, 1963) and independent samples (Witte, 1993). Of interest to the authors was the perception of what one experienced and what might be considered ideal (i.e., years in a classroom personally experienced and years of teaching experience necessary before becoming a counselor). Qualitative measurements included categories of responses for age, gender, years as an administrator or counselor, years as a teacher before becoming a counselor or administrator, and optimum number of years of teaching experience necessary before becoming a school counselor.

Results

The differences between administrators and counselors reporting years as a classroom teacher and suggesting an ideal or optimum number of years necessary for classroom teaching were significant ($\chi^2 > 10.83$, $p<.001$, with df=1 for administrators; $\chi^2 > 10.83$, $p<.001$, with df=1 for counselors and Mann-Whitney=3856, $p<.001$ for administrators; Mann-

Whitney=16612, p<.001 for counselors). Further, not all respondents answered all questions.

Response rate for administrators was 41 percent (55 returned out of 133 mailed) and for counselors 55 percent (117 returned out of 211 mailed). Overall, the response rate was 50%. Counselors responding were 46% female and 54% male while administrators who responded 20% female and 80% male.

All administrators and counselors did not answer all questions, therefore totals for qualitative responses varied. Only those responses that contained completed answers on this portion of the questionnaire were recorded. No attempt was made to interpolate incomplete sections. Table 1 reflects the responses of administrators while Table 2 records the comments of counselors. (Tables 1 and 2 about here.)

While comparing the number of years that school administrators experienced in the classroom to the number of years perceived necessary as foundational for school counselors, several differences were noted consistent with the quantitative evaluation noted above. Categories available for administrators included, none, 1-3, 4-7, 8-12, and 12+ years. Results indicated that no administrators answered none, 5% indicated 1-3, 29% indicated 4-7, 31% indicated 8-12, and 35% indicated more than 12 years of teaching experience were obtained before becoming administrators. Additionally, 4% indicated no teaching experience was optimum, 13% indicated 1-3 years, 70% indicated 4-7, 9% indicated 8-12, and 4% indicated that more than 12 years of teaching experience was optimum to become a school counselor.

School counselors were asked to indicate the number of years of classroom teaching they had before becoming a school counselor. Further, counselors were requested to comment on the number of years of

Table 1

Administrator Comments on Experience and Optimum Number of Years Teaching Necessary Prior to Becoming a School Counselor

Number of years of classroom teaching before becoming an administrator	Responses	Percent
none	0	0
1-3	3	5
4-7	16	29
8-12	17	31
12 plus	19	35
Optimum number of years of classroom teaching necessary before becoming a counselor	**Responses**	**Percent**
none	2	4
1-3	7	13
4-7	38	70
8-12	5	9
12 plus	2	4

Table 2

School Counselor Comments on Experience and Optimum Number of Years Teaching Necessary Prior to Becoming a School Counselor

Number of years of classroom teaching before becoming a counselor	Responses	Percent
none	8	7
1-3	29	25
4-7	27	23
8-12	20	17
12 plus	33	28

Optimum number of years of classroom teaching necessary before becoming a counselor	Responses	Percent
none	10	9
1-3	50	45
4-7	46	42
8-12	4	4
12 plus	0	0

teaching experience they believed would be optimum for individuals before becoming school counselors. Categories used on the questionnaire for the counselors to respond included none, 1-3, 4-7, 8-12, and more than 12 years. Compilation of information returned indicated 7% had no teaching experience before becoming a counselor, 25% indicated 1-3 years, 23% indicated 4-7, 17% indicated 8-12, and 28% indicated more than 12 years. Additionally, counselors who thought that the ideal number of years of teaching experience before becoming a school counselor were distributed as follows: 9% indicated no teaching experience was necessary, 45% indicated 1-3 years would be best, 42% indicated 4-7, 4% indicated 7-12, and no counselors indicated that more than 12 years in the classroom would be ideal before becoming a school counselor.

Discussion

The authors of this research approached the question of the necessity of classroom experience from opposite viewpoints. At the beginning of the research, each was equally convinced of the correctness of disparate positions, lending divergence and intensity to the discussions during the formation of the research question and the instrument.

As Bush's (1993) work focused on school counselors, it appeared to these authors that by also asking individuals (i.e., school administrators) who are usually responsible for a major portion of the hiring decision of a counselor, as well as the counselors themselves, about optimum teaching

experience a comparison of perceptions could be made. The question of competence was not reviewed, only optimum number of years.

Several authors (Baker & Herr (1976); Barret & Schmidt, 1986; Cohen (1961); Dilley, Foster, & Bowers (1973); Friedland (1969); Havens, 1972; Kehas & Morse (1970); Peterson & Brown (1968); Stewart (1961); Wittmer & Webster (1969); note that there is evidence suggesting that a classroom teaching experience is not a sine qua non for school counseling. Bush (1993) comments that within the context of that evidence, only a few reasons are cited for having a classroom experience, relationships with peers and satisfaction with the field. While these reasons might, in and of themselves, constitute a necessary portion of a counseling experience, they do not appear to be sufficient to define successful counseling experience in the minds of administrators.

Conversely, there is evidence of perceptions (Baker, 1994., 1993; Bellak, 1994; Gold et al, 1994; Hoyt, 1961; Hogan et al, 1994; Martin, 1993; McCarthey & Sorenson, 1993; Moon et al., 1993; VandeCreek & Sexton, 1994) that a classroom experience is foundational to even being hired as a school counselor. That is to say, all things being equal in a hiring procedure, a school administrator's perception of the need for a classroom experience might prevail. Of course, all things very rarely are equal, and as the competition among applicants for limited school counseling positions intensifies, such a consideration by a school administrator appears to be important.

As the χ^2 calculations indicate, the test for independent populations is significant. There appears to be a high level of confidence that an individual's years of experience in the classroom did not influence a

perception of the optimum number of years of experience necessary before becoming a school counselor. This is consistent for both administrator and counselor populations sampled. For instance, 29% of administrators have 4-7 years of teaching experience before becoming administrators and 70% responded that school counselors should have 4-7 years experience before becoming counselors. Additionally, 25% of school counselors indicated that they have taught for 1-3 years before becoming school counselors while 45% believed that 1-3 would be the optimum range of years teaching experience.

Results obtained from this research are limited due to the 50% sampling procedure and the nonresponse bias that exists among the individuals who were not sampled and those who did not return instruments. Additionally, the research suggests that longitudinal information is needed, therefore additional information to document trends is needed. More altruistically, by providing a longitudinal data base that facilitates educational relationships and informs decision makers, the development of the profession and practice of school counseling is better served (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994).

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